

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

December 19, 2001

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Congress Approves \$500,000 to Help Establish Walter Capps Center on Religion and Public Life at UCSB

A federal appropriations bill just approved by House and Senate conferees includes \$500,000 to assist in establishing the Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Religion and Public Life at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Walter Capps served 10 months as U.S. Representative from California's 22nd Congressional District -- his term cut short by a fatal heart attack in October 1997. His election to Congress had followed a 33-year career at UCSB as a popular professor of religious studies. He was an advocate of ardent but polite discourse as the proper road to problem solving. As a member of Congress, Capps showed an uncommon commitment to civility and duty.

A group of 52 members of the House of Representatives last April wrote to Congressional leaders seeking support for a request that funds be included in the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Education account to help establish the Capps Center.

The funds were included in the fiscal year 2002 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Conference Report approved by the House of Representatives Wednesday (Dec. 19).

In a statement, the California Bipartisan Congressional delegation applauded the action. "The creation of the Capps Center is a fitting tribute to our former colleague," said Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel. "The center will be a perpetual resource for the nation to explore the connections between religion and public life."

UCSB officials were delighted by the news. Chancellor Henry T. Yang said he was extremely pleased by the overwhelming bipartisan support for the initiative. "This action speaks to Walter's outstanding legacy as both a teacher and a Congressman," said Yang. "He envisioned an ongoing public dialogue between the academic and public arenas. This new center named in his honor will seek to understand the rich interactions among religion, politics, public life, and community service, and we are looking forward to the important and exciting programs that this center will bring to our campus, to our Santa Barbara community, and to society."

In honor of Capps and what he stood for, the Department of Religious Studies at UCSB and La Casa de Maria Retreat and Conference Centers sponsored a conference on religion and public life last spring in which national political, religious, and academic leaders took part.

Wade Clark Roof, chair of the department and an organizer of that event, said the conference had served to build broader recognition for how a permanent Capps Center might address the great issues of our time -- "issues where moral values, beliefs, and ethics play crucial roles."

"This support from Congress is a fitting tribute to Walter Capps's vision of an engaged democracy," said Roof. "It will allow us to continue the broad public dialogue that we began with our conference last spring." He said that through a program of lectures, conferences, internships, and visiting professors, the center would work to engage the university and the community in that dialogue.

David Marshall, the Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts at UCSB, said such a center was needed now more than ever. "Never before has the study of religion seemed so relevant," he said. "In the aftermath of September 11th, it is crucial that we understand the cultures and traditions that make up our world. The Capps Center will help to create an important dialogue between the university, the community, and policy makers in Washington. And it will help us to live up to the legacy of Walter Capps."

Walter Capps was succeeded in Congress by his widow, Lois, who continues to represent California's 22nd Congressional District.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.